

Port Partnerships

*Moving forward with
focus and certainty.*



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Meaningful partnerships are the foundation of success. Not only is this good business, it's the keystone upon which the captain of the port (COTP) of Coast Guard Sector St. Petersburg operates. One avenue that provides a personal approach for our port partners and stakeholders is the COTP's use of the sector's ports and waterways safety (PAWS) branch to partner with industry.

Serving as representatives for a plethora of waterways safety and security issues, PAWS personnel leverage resources and provide the maritime community accessibility to the Coast Guard at a working level. The groundwork for this atmosphere of trust has been the culmination of years of local port constituents' and Sector St. Petersburg's hard work.

Teambuilding

The Tampa Bay Harbor Safety and Security Committee (TBHSSC) is comprised of representatives from three port authorities (Manatee, St. Petersburg, and Tampa), plus other key maritime industry representatives such as the Tampa Bay Pilots Association and shipping, dry dock, and towing vessel companies. It is the foundation upon which the COTP furthers relationships to facilitate the safe and efficient flow of commerce.

The TBHSSC helped develop the Tampa cooperative vessel traffic service (CVTS), a joint venture between the Tampa Port Authority and the COTP, to actively monitor vessel transits within the tight confines of Tampa Bay. The vessel movement committee (VMC)



Multiple Coast Guard missions are performed in Tampa Bay. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

and port heavy weather advisory group (PHWAG), also under the umbrella of TBHSSC, were conceived to coordinate vessel movements.

PAWS serves as a member of the vessel movement committee to ensure port users are advised in advance of significant marine events as well as dredging and construction projects, and to ensure critical vessel movements of dead ship and oversized transits are carried out with the full concurrence of VMC members. Collaboration with the PHWAG and VMC enables the COTP to receive expert recommendations to safeguard the port and its surrounding infrastructure. This is es-

VESSEL MOVEMENT COMMITTEE

The vessel movement committee is a subcommittee of the Tampa Bay Harbor Safety and Security Committee, made up of members from the Tampa Bay Pilots Association, port authorities, and industry.

Meetings are held at least monthly, and more frequently if the need arises. The VMC is charged with reviewing, assessing, and making recommendations to the COTP relative to vessel movements within the port.

The subcommittee de-conflicts vessel movements that impact waterways, such as dead ship tows and channel closures during dredge operations and marine events. It also conducts post-casualty studies at the request of the COTP.

During VMC meetings, Sector St. Pete ports and waterways safety staff updates VMC members on the status of regional dredging projects as well as safety and security zone enforcement, and addresses other port-specific issues.



A recent harbor safety and security committee meeting. U.S. Coast Guard photo.

pecially crucial during hurricane season or in anticipation of other emergencies, such as channel closures due to power or steering loss on deep-draft ships.

Area of Responsibility

Sector St. Petersburg's COTP zone spans 550 nautical miles of the west coast of Florida, and includes Tampa Bay, which is comprised of the ports of Tampa, Manatee, and St. Petersburg. These are among the largest and most diversified ports in Florida and the nation. During 2008, for example, Tampa Bay expedited 52 million tons of cargo and more than 765,000 cruise ship passengers.¹

On average, Tampa Bay is only 12 feet deep. Because it is so shallow, man-made shipping channels have been dredged to allow large ships safe passage to the ports of Tampa, Manatee, and other harbors. The main shipping channel is 43 feet deep and 40 miles long. Coordi-

nating dredging operations for new berths and maintenance must be closely coordinated and monitored due to environmental and commercial considerations.

Harbor Safety and Security Committee

Tampa Bay's history has been scarred with numerous maritime casualties, including the loss of the USCGC *Blackthorn* in 1980, a catastrophic freighter allision later that year resulting in the collapse of the Sunshine Skyway Bridge, and a massive three-vessel collision and fire in 1993.² Following these events, the state of Florida commissioned a consortium to examine mitigation efforts to reduce risks in this bay.

In 1995, Florida established the vessel traffic information service (VTIS) consortium to help develop a VTIS system. It was established by a partnership among public and private entities to serve all ports in the Tampa area. The members were drawn from a broad spectrum of local interests, and the Coast Guard participated as a non-voting member. The consortium completed its work in November 1996, and the Tampa Bay Harbor Safety Committee planned to develop and implement a Tampa Bay VTIS.

Thirteen years later, this body has grown to a board of 25 directors, including COTP Sector St. Petersburg, and has incorporated security into its mission. The Tampa Bay Harbor Safety and Security Committee meets quarterly, and the COTP plays an integral part in these meetings, providing expertise and guidance as needed. These meetings are used to conduct tabletop exercises to simulate possible port disasters. They also proactively provide an opportunity to foster teamwork. The relationships forged through the TBHSSC have given rise to various subcommittees the sector's PAWS branch interacts with daily.

Cooperative Vessel Traffic Service

One of the harbor safety and security committee's most significant recent accomplishments is establishing the Tampa Bay Cooperative Vessel Traffic Service (CVTS), an authority designed to improve the safety and effi-



Tampa CVTS watchstanders. U.S. Coast Guard photos.

ciency of commercial vessel traffic and protect the environment.

The CVTS co-locates Coast Guard watchstanders with Tampa Port Authority employees who together manage and direct port operations, waterway safety, security, and dockside management. Continual interaction among these parties significantly increases marine casualty reporting, aids in collision avoidance, and radically reduces response time for Coast Guard assets.

Tampa CVTS monitors approximately 9,000 vessel movements annually. Watchstanders advise mariners of other vessel movements, potential meeting situations, crossing situations, conflicts, hazards, adverse weather, and aids to navigation discrepancies. They also liaise between vessels in distress and the Sector St. Petersburg Command Center on an as-needed basis.

Port Sutton, a close-quarters segment of the waterway with overlapping wharfs and certain dangerous cargoes being moved throughout, is coordinated through CVTS via what is known as the Port Sutton working group. Signatories to this group work closely with CVTS to make dockage decisions.

Sector St. Petersburg and the port communities of Tampa, Manatee, and St. Petersburg have been reaping the rewards of successful partnerships for a long time, thanks to the foundation laid by its forward-thinking maritime leaders and their ability to set aside competing interests and differences for the benefit of the port community. The harmonious blend of initiatives addressed by the ded-

PORT HEAVY WEATHER ADVISORY GROUP

The Port Heavy Weather Advisory Group (PHWAG) is a group of key maritime stakeholders that evaluates the effectiveness of the Tampa Bay port heavy weather contingency plan and advises the COTP of risks to the port and its infrastructure resulting from a hurricane or tropical storm.

The concept was originally introduced during a Tampa Bay marine advisory committee meeting in 1997. The port heavy weather plan had proven to be inefficient, as there were numerous deficiencies found during the previous hurricane season. For example, during evacuation prior to tropical storm Josephine in the fall of 1996, one of the vessels ran aground and posed a major environmental threat to the bay. Upon further investigation, it was evident the port lacked a consistent method of determining port evacuation orders. Additionally, the Coast Guard lacked the resources to determine the threat an approaching storm posed to Tampa Bay or to properly evaluate the port's resources.

Leaders determined that those who used those resources daily were the ones who could accurately determine their maximum utilization. Therefore, PHWAG membership includes the Tampa, Manatee, and St. Petersburg Port Authorities; the Tampa Bay Pilots Association; vessel owners; terminal operators; ships' agents; and facility operators. The advisory group also includes a COTP representative, who acts as a conduit for any PHWAG recommendations as well as the exchange of information to and from the COTP.



icated maritime professionals of the TBHSSC has resulted in substantial navigational safety advancements.

About the author:

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Endnotes:

¹ <http://www.tampaport.com>

² *Proceedings of the Marine Safety & Security Council*, Winter 07-08, p. 84.

